

Wootton Upper School

Hall End Road, Wootton, Bedford MK43 9HT

Inspection dates

8–9 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16–19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Recent changes in staffing, higher numbers of pupils joining in Year 9 and the opening of the school's new sixth-form college have limited the capacity of school leaders to drive improvements.
- Overall achievement has declined since the last inspection. Most pupils made better progress this year, but currently, inconsistencies in teaching and the management of behaviour are preventing them from making good progress.
- Not all teachers ensure that the different needs of pupils are met. Some of average and lower ability find work too difficult, and lose interest and disengage from learning.
- Low-level disruption in lessons by a small minority of pupils is allowed to disturb the learning of others because it is not managed well enough.
- Weak teaching and leadership in science prevent some pupils from making enough progress.
- Pupils do not receive enough guidance and advice about courses to follow up career opportunities.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils, and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs is not rising quickly enough.
- The good practice seen in humanities and performing arts is not widely shared to promote greater consistency in teaching.
- The regular absence, poor attitudes and immaturity of a minority of pupils restrict their personal development.
- The progress of the small proportion of learners remaining in the sixth form is not routinely monitored to ensure they achieve well enough.
- Self-evaluation and improvement plans are not sharply focused on raising achievement. Data are not analysed thoroughly to spot patterns in pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.
- The Governing Board does not receive all of the information it needs to challenge school leaders fully.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders have stabilised the school and are beginning to raise pupils' achievement.
- Good teaching is evident in a range of subjects.
- Specialisms in performing arts and music engage many pupils and enrich their lives.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure prompt improvements to the quality of teaching in all key stages by:
 - routinely monitoring lessons and scrutinising pupils' work to identify where the strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie, and target training towards those staff who need it most
 - eradicating teaching that is regularly seen to be inadequate
 - ensuring that all teachers plan learning that meets the needs of pupils of different abilities, captures their interest and motivates and engages them to work hard
 - holding teachers accountable for raising the achievement of pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those who are disabled or have special educational needs
 - enabling staff to share best practice in teaching, learning and assessment so that the strategies known to be working well and making a difference to pupils' progress become embedded across the school
 - strengthening the teaching of science and ensuring that all pupils receive regular teaching by specialist staff.

- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils in all key stages by:
 - reaffirming the school's procedures for managing behaviour in lessons and checking that all staff apply them consistently
 - thoroughly analysing the data collected about pupils' progress, behaviour and attitudes, and attendance to gauge how well they are doing across all of their subjects, to spot patterns of poor behaviour, and take action to improve it or prevent it from happening again
 - taking more robust action to tackle the persistent absence of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - ensuring that all pupils receive sufficient guidance and advice about the most suitable courses to follow at the end of each key stage, and the career opportunities open to them.

- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - accurately evaluating the school's effectiveness to provide all staff and governors with a clear overview of what it is doing well and what it needs to improve
 - strengthening the strategic leadership of science to lead improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, and to ensure that pupils study courses suited to their abilities and interests
 - incorporating challenging, measurable targets into the school's improvement plans to hold senior leaders accountable for securing improvements
 - ensuring that additional funding is used effectively to enable pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve equally as well as others
 - routinely monitoring and evaluating the achievement and welfare of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, and taking prompt action to support those who are underachieving
 - ensuring that governors are provided with a full picture of the school's performance so they can support and challenge fully senior leaders about the actions taken to raise achievement.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The executive principal, supported by his deputy, has steered the school through a period of significant change, increasing its intake of pupils in Year 9 and opening a free school for sixth-form learners on another site. During this time, changes in staffing, a newly formed leadership team and the challenges presented by leading and managing two schools have led to some turbulence and a decline in standards.
- Leaders have not done enough to improve the quality of teaching or secure good behaviour. Inconsistencies in managing behaviour and some inadequate teaching have not been tackled fully and have contributed directly to the decline in pupils' achievement since the last inspection.
- Recent action taken to reverse this decline is beginning to work. School leaders have raised expectations of staff and reorganised middle leaders to increase the school's capacity to lead improvements. Appraisal procedures have been strengthened to hold staff accountable. Training has taken place, the curriculum has been adapted to include more time for teaching English and mathematics and new procedures put in place to manage challenging behaviour.
- However, senior leaders overestimate the impact of these changes. Their evaluation of the school's effectiveness is far too generous. The overall gains made in pupils' progress this year are due to the intensive programme of interventions provided for pupils in Year 11 during 2015, rather than improvements to the quality of teaching. Some weak teaching has been challenged and some staff have left the school, but some inadequate teaching remains.
- A large team of senior leaders has discrete responsibility for leading key aspects of the school's improvement plan, but these plans lack rigour. A few aspects have clear, numerical targets to measure the improvements made over time, and to hold leaders accountable for driving improvements, but most other aspects do not.
- Leaders collect a wide range of performance data, including information about the progress of different groups of pupils, and their attitudes, behaviour and attendance. These data are not presented coherently to illustrate improvement, or to highlight where senior leaders and staff need to focus their efforts. Despite regular requests for information during the inspection, some of it was not readily available or was provided far too late.
- The achievement of different groups of pupils is not routinely analysed to identify what needs to be done to raise achievement. For example, disadvantaged pupils have not progressed as well as other pupils over the past three years, but little has been done to determine why, and put in place strategies to improve this. A small proportion of children who are looked after underachieved in 2015. The reasons for this have not been analysed fully or reported upon to prevent this from happening again.
- Managers responsible for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs do not check the links between their behaviour, attendance and their progress. The quality of provision and support provided for them is not routinely monitored. Data to illustrate the progress they make in all lessons are not collated fully.
- The pupil premium (additional government funding to raise the achievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds) has funded one-to-one tuition, additional revision classes after school and during the holidays, and enrichment activities such as developing pupils' life-skills to build their confidence. This has helped to narrow the gap in achievement between them and others in the school in English, but not in mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils made significantly less progress than others and the gap in the proportion of them attaining an A* to C grade in GCSE mathematics widened in 2015. Not all of the pupil premium was spent in 2015.
- Leaders have a clear vision and ambition for the school but have not secured a culture of high expectations for the social behaviour and respect of all pupils. Staff are still adapting to the demands of a changing population of pupils from different backgrounds, and of varying abilities and interests.
- The majority of responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were positive. Increasingly, senior leaders are engaging with parents and carers to seek their views. For example, short, parental surveys carried out during parents' evenings this year provide clear indications of what they believe the school does well, and needs to improve upon.

■ The governance of the school

- The school is governed by an advisory body, which reports to the Academy Board. This structure is currently under review to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the advisory body are clear and that it can report accurately upon the school's work.
 - Members of the Academy Board are experienced professionals. They are ambitious for the school and have overseen its strategic development during its expansion and extension onto another site. They fully support the executive principal's drive to secure improvements.
 - They are too dependent on the information shared with them by senior leaders. They know most, but not all, of the school's strengths and weaknesses because the executive principal's evaluation is too generous. Reports to governors provide headline data but do not include enough detailed analysis of the performance of subjects, groups of pupils or trends over time.
 - In the past, the performance of teachers has not been well managed, resulting in the majority of them progressing along or up the salary scale regardless of their effectiveness. New procedures introduced in 2014 have changed this and salary increases are now driven by staff performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors ensure that regular checks are made of the single central record and that a suitably trained governor is present at interviews to appoint new staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Senior leaders judge the quality of teaching to be good. Inspectors do not agree with this. It requires significant improvement because not enough of it leads to good progress made by pupils, and too much of it is ineffective.
- Not all teachers apply the agreed procedures to manage pupils' behaviour. This issue is undermining the actions taken to improve teaching because the casual attitudes and poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils are allowed to disrupt the learning of others.
- In science, staff changes and difficulties in recruiting new staff have weakened the overall quality of teaching. Some Year 11 pupils raised concerns with inspectors about the lack of progress they were making in biology because of staff absence. There is some effective teaching within the department, but a lack of strategic leadership means that these talents are not being harnessed to raise the overall quality of science teaching.
- In mathematics, pupils practise their calculation skills but are not given opportunities to master them by applying their learning in different contexts, or thinking for themselves. Some teachers do not check that all pupils have a secure understanding before moving on to the next piece of work. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, some pupils lacked the basic understanding needed to cope with the challenging work given to them. Their reluctance to ask for help and the lack of support provided by the teacher meant that their learning and progress stalled.
- In most lessons, teachers have seating plans that clearly show pupils' ability, their specific needs, and those deemed to be disadvantaged. However, not all teachers take account of this when planning learning. In mixed-ability classes, more able pupils usually understand what to do and are motivated to work hard. As tasks are often the same for all pupils, those of average and lower ability do not always understand what to do. Some disengage from learning and their progress slows. This is clearly evident in their books, which often show a minimal amount of work and tasks left unfinished.
- The quality of assessment varies widely. Not all pupils have, or are aware of, their targets to help them improve, particularly those in Year 9. Where targets are set, not all teachers' marking relates to them, so pupils are unaware of whether they are working well enough to meet or exceed them. Marking also shows that expectations of pupils are often too low. Agreed procedures to provide feedback to pupils are followed, but poorly presented and incomplete work is left unchallenged, and basic errors in spelling and grammar are not corrected.
- Some action is being taken to improve teaching. Lesson monitoring has increased. Staff who do not teach well enough are offered a 10-week support programme to help them improve their effectiveness. The impact of this has not been fully evaluated to gauge whether it is leading to sustained improvement.
- Good examples of assessment were noted in humanities, where pupils are provided with detailed written feedback about their work and opportunities to redraft or correct it. Teachers' marking links pupils' personal targets with other assessed work to show them that they are on track to meet their targets. This good practice is not widespread.

- Good teaching is evident in a range of subjects, but there are too few opportunities to share this across all subjects. For example, in drama, good subject knowledge, organisation and management of pupils enabled them to plan together, share ideas and evaluate the work of others. In history, pupils worked to improve their examination technique using past papers to determine the best ways of gaining high marks.
- Leaders have amended the curriculum to widen pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. When asked, pupils were unclear about the term but further investigation confirmed that they are taught about the principles that underpin British values such as democracy and the rule of law, and respect for other faiths, religions and beliefs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Not all pupils show the expected level of maturity and confidence for their ages. There is too much silliness, lack of respect and poor behaviour from a minority of them.
- Overall attendance is broadly average, but too many pupils who do not achieve well enough are persistently absent from school. Not enough is done to ensure that some disadvantaged pupils, and those who are disabled or have special educational needs, regularly attend. The achievement of some disadvantaged pupils is hindered by their persistent absence from school which has increased further this year.
- Tutorials are not used well enough to instil in pupils the right attitudes for learning. In these sessions, not all pupils engage fully in discussion about current affairs and topical issues.
- Leaders do not ensure that pupils who want careers advice, or experience of the workplace, receive it.
- Suitable guidance is provided to pupils in Year 11 aiming to progress to further study or training. The advice and guidance given to pupils in Year 9 when selecting suitable GCSE and vocational courses to pursue are less effective. For example, some lower ability pupils choose to study three sciences, which may be too demanding for them.
- Actions to protect pupils, and develop their understanding of sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism, are promoted well through visitors to the school, the personal, social and health education programme and religious studies lessons. This, and the broad range of enrichment opportunities provided for pupils, adds significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Inspectors found that not all pupils behave well enough, respect their peers or their teachers, or behave in a responsible, mature manner.
- Pupils feel that behaviour outside lessons is generally orderly and calm. Inspectors' observations confirmed this. Most pupils choose to gather in friendship groups and talk together.
- They feel that in some lessons, behaviour is not good enough and that a small minority disrupt the learning of others because some teachers allow them to do so. Inspectors noted some poor behaviour and passivity in some lessons.
- Pupils feel that the recent introduction of behaviour managers is helping to improve behaviour because 'pupils can't get away with it anymore'.
- Data are not checked to gauge whether improvements are being made to pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance, or to spot emerging trends. For example, the type and frequency of pupils referred to the school's partnership centre due to poor behaviour are not analysed in depth to identify patterns, or the reasons why some pupils are often sent there.
- School records show few incidents of bullying or racist behaviour. Any incidents arising are followed up in detail so they are not repeated.
- Very few pupils are excluded from school. When exclusions do occur, it is done to protect other pupils from harm.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' prior attainment on entry has changed in recent years as the school attracts more pupils with a wider range of abilities. Currently it is broadly similar to that found nationally.
- Over the past two years, the percentage of Year 11 pupils attaining at least five A* to C grades including in English and mathematics at GCSE has been similar to the national average. This year, the overall progress of Year 11 pupils improved significantly, mainly due to the wide range of additional support provided for them.
- Attainment is high in a range of subjects, particularly those linked to the school's specialism in performing arts, and in geography, textiles and some languages. Attainment is notably low in science, design technology, computing and business studies.
- A declining trend over the past three years in the percentage of pupils attaining A* to C grades in English and in mathematics at GCSE means that not enough of them attain the essential qualifications needed for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Pupils' progress improved in English and in mathematics, and to a lesser extent in science this year. However, not all pupils made the progress expected of them. The proportion of more able pupils making more than expected progress is persistently lower than the national average. A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils made expected progress but gaps in their performance compared with others are not closing fast enough. A small proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs underachieved.
- The progress made by a small minority of pupils taught off-site is not routinely monitored to ensure that they acquire enough basic qualifications.
- School data show that, currently, a similar pattern of improvement is emerging, suggesting that the actions taken by school leaders are beginning to embed and lead to further improvement. However, inspectors' observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work did not confirm this. Too much inconsistency in teaching and in the management of behaviour are preventing some pupils from making sufficient progress. This is clearly evident in the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books in a range of subjects.

16–19 study programmes

require improvement

- Since the opening of the school's new sixth-form college, the large majority of learners have moved to the new site. Only a very small proportion of Year 13 learners remain on the school site, most of whom are studying subjects in the performing arts. At the end of this year, almost all sixth-form teaching will be at the college site. Study programmes in the performing arts will remain on the academy site.
- A-level results in 2015 were below the national average. At AS level, the proportion of learners attaining A* to E grades was above average but the percentage of learners gaining higher grades was lower than the national average.
- A small minority of these learners entered Year 12 without at least a C grade in English or mathematics. By the end of Year 13, leaders did not ensure that all of them attained these vital qualifications.
- Leaders ensure that the personal development, behaviour and welfare of learners on the school site are prioritised and that they receive sufficient pastoral care. Less attention is paid to monitoring their academic progress, or the quality of teaching they receive.
- In lessons, learners receive regular advice and feedback to improve their work but at times it does not enable them to explain their work to others or evaluate what they are trying to achieve.
- Not all learners receive sufficient guidance and advice about the courses to follow as they enter and leave Year 12. A few of them feel that they had not realised the amount of work involved in studying four A levels, or which ones to continue in Year 13. They commented that in some subjects, written feedback is really helpful, but in other subjects it is too general.
- More than half of all learners plan to go on to university. Others intend to seek an apprenticeship or are currently unclear about what to do.

School details

Unique reference number	137522
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10005598

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16–19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,030
Of which, number on roll in 16–19 study programmes	38
Appropriate authority	The Academy Trust Board
Chair	Simon O'Toole
Executive Principal	Michael Gleeson
Telephone number	01234 767123
Website	www.wootton.beds.sch.uk
Email address	Wootton@wootton.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2011

Information about this school

- Wootton Upper School is larger than average.
- Since converting to an academy in 2012, it has opened a free school for sixth-form learners on a nearby site.
- Most pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average.
- Since 2014, an executive principal has led the school and the sixth-form college. Senior leaders and some teachers work across both sites.
- The school makes arrangements to educate a very small minority of pupils off-site at The Greys Education Centre, or at Bedford College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 lessons, six of which were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders and two groups of pupils, and held a telephone conference call with members of the Academy Board.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including safeguarding policy and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of the schools' advisory body meetings, assessment data, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' books in lessons.
- Inspectors considered 146 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, the 44 free texts sent by parents and carers and one written complaint.
- Inspectors investigated a recent, written complaint about the school received by Ofsted.

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